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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AFRICAN DIPLOMATS DESCRIBE BRAZIL'S AFRICA FOCUS
AS MUCH RHETORIC, LITTLE SUBSTANCE

REF: 03 BRASILIA 2156

1. (SBU) Summary: In 2003 the incoming Lula administration asserted it would refocus its foreign policy to place greater emphasis on Africa. Some African diplomats here, however, believe that Brazilian interest in their countries has remained unchanged, despite the rhetoric. While they admit they may be out of the loop on issues dealt with in New York or Geneva, the diplomats could identify no specific initiatives or activities reflecting increased GOB attention, except for South Africa and the lusophone countries -- countries already marked for closer ties. They were also apprehensive that Haiti could distract Brazil from future African peacekeeping efforts. The griping may be premature, but given recent GOB behavior, other areas of the globe may be capturing Brazil's interest, at least for now. End Summary

2. (U) Since taking office in January 2003, the Lula Administration has emphasized its intention to rethink Brazil's foreign policy and, in particular, place increased focus on Africa. In various fora during the first six months of his administration, President Lula specifically targeted Africa, emphasizing Brazil's deep historical and cultural ties to the continent and the commonality of interests. As noted reftel, this policy stems from President Lula's desire to demonstrate Brazil's leadership as an advocate for Third World issues and in global trade interests, which in turn will bolster Brazil's bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat.

3. (SBU) From one perspective, however, the reality of Brazil's new African focus has not, so far, met expectations. In an informal luncheon with poloffs, senior diplomats from Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Angola described the Lula Administration's Africa-oriented foreign policy as more rhetoric than fact. True, they conceded, both President Lula and Foreign Minister Amorin visited Africa in 2003. But the countries visited, the diplomats said, reflected existing GOB priorities to strengthen Brazil's leadership role among lusophone countries (Angola, Mozambique, Sao Tome & Principe, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau) and ties with South Africa. The diplomats, a few of whom have served in Brazil for many years, could point to no obvious change in GOB policy or attention towards their nations.

4. (SBU) The diplomats admitted that many issues of concern between their governments and Brazil -- particularly those involving the World Trade Organization -- are conducted in New York or Geneva, leaving their embassies out of the loop. Yet, it still appeared that the GOB was more concerned with counting heads for UNSC reform -- and support for Brazil's bid for permanent UNSC seat -- than in being a champion of Africa's interests, supporting African peacekeeping, or augmenting trade. The diplomats could not identify any examples of expanded commercial opportunities for African products nor any common trade negotiation strategies that would benefit Africa. Several noted that Brazil and many African countries produce similar agricultural products and therefore Brazil is a competitor rather than a benefactor.

5. (SBU) As one constraint to closer Brazil-Africa ties, all cited the dearth, difficulty, and expense of flights between Brazil and Africa. Except for flights to Johannesburg and Luanda (not noted as a aviation hub), the diplomats could identify no direct service between Brazil and Africa. Instead, travelers had to transit Europe at great cost and significant delay. To remedy this, a few urged that the Brazilian Government press airlines to open up routes across the Atlantic.

6. (SBU) Brazil's recent commitment of over one thousand peacekeepers to Haiti, as opposed to the GOB's paucity of commitment to African peacekeeping, was perceived as evidence of Brazil's true lack of interest in Africa's problems. A few added that even if Brazil had been thinking of Africa before, Haiti would be a significant distraction and impediment to any future African peacekeeping mission. Diplomats from the DRC and Cote d'Ivoire, countries often mentioned by the GOB as possible peacekeeping focal points,

stated there had been no effort by the Foreign Ministry to engage with them. (Note: In a recent meeting senior Foreign Ministry officials confirmed to poloffs that GOB interest in participating in a Cote d'Ivoire PKO had been eclipsed by Haiti. End Note)

17. (SBU) Comment: It may still be relatively early in the Lula administration to point to Brazil-Africa success stories, and we note the GOB's interest in HIV/AIDs relief efforts in Africa seems unabated. Some of the complaints leveled against the GOB may be premature but the diplomats make a legitimate point. The Africa-focus rhetoric aside, Brazil's current foreign policy emphasis on South American/Caribbean and major, like-minded developing nations (ex. South Africa, India, China) may leave little room for paying closer attention to Africa.
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